A pleasure to read

‘Indians, Cowboys and UFOs’ tells the stories of a Navajo Reservation teacher in the 1970s

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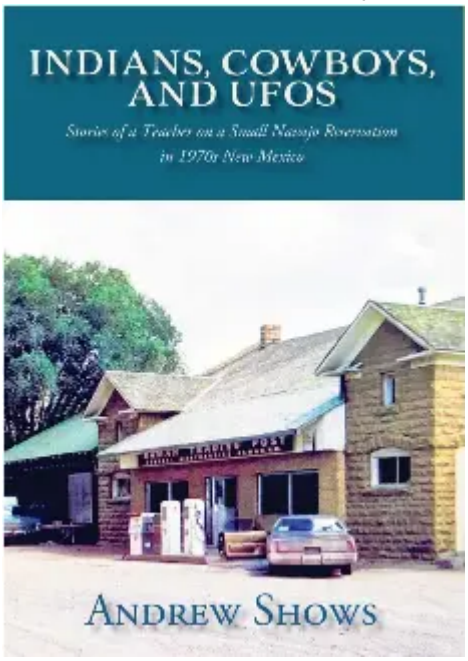
There are exactly 100 stories in Corrales author Andrew Shows’ first book. While they are unconnected, Shows says these stories — 99 of them anyway — are true.



The book is titled “Indians, Cowboys and UFOs” and is subtitled “Stories of a Teacher on a Small Navajo Reservation in 1970s New Mexico.”

For three years, summers included, Shows was an art teacher at Ramah Navajo School in west-central New
Mexico.

Most of the stories occur outside the classroom. Some have nothing to do with teaching. The stories serve up moments of adventure, friendship, fellowship and school activities. All leavened with Shows’ brand of humor. They’re a pleasure to read.

The first adventure starts in the opening story. In it, Shows writes that he had wanted to be a cowboy from when he was 4 or 5 years old and living in Washington, D.C. His family had a television. That enabled him to watch Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy on the tube. They showed him how to be a cowboy, Shows writes.

Or so he thought.

He got to experience a real cowboy’s life when he was hired to work for three weeks on a ranch in Folsom, New Mexico. Shows was on early summer break from graduate studies at New Mexico Highlands University.

The job would provide income to pay for his last quarter of schooling.

Shows’ description of his ranch experience hardly resembled anything those TV cowboys did on screen.

“At four o-clock (a.m.) the bell suddenly rang, jarringly through my sleep-drugged bones. All the hands were jumping from their bunks and proceeding to work. Work?”

Shows asked about breakfast. Breakfast, he was told, was at 7 a.m. First, the chores.
His first chore was to milk six goats. He was shown how to do that. And he also had to set out a pail of goat milk for an orphaned young antelope named Sean that the ranch family adopted.
Shows also learned to ride a horse. Something else that Gene, Roy and Hopalong hadn't explained.
Another of Shows' adventures was a motorcycle trip over Christmas break in 1974 from Ramah to San Carlos, Mexico. Ramah math teacher Jesse O'Leary invited Shows to go with him on a BMW bike. The story is titled "Mexico or Bust" though it could have been better titled "Mexico, Back to Ramah, or Bust."
He described in great detail their journey to old Mexico. "I was six-foot-three inches, Jesse not so much. Jesse had a front windshield to protect him ... I was too tall," Shows recalled in the story.
So far, the December weather was warm. They visited Guaymas and ate tons of shrimp and sardines. Shows collected seashells, later carving bear figures on them.
Weather on the return trip was kind until they got to Show Low, Arizona. A blizzard hit them. At Witch Well, Arizona, Shows writes, "the temperature was dropping like a lead weight. Snow was starting to stick. When we got to Zuni, I told Jesse we had to stop. I couldn't feel my legs." They stopped at the pueblo. Shows writes that he fell off the bike. He couldn't move his legs. "The elements had seeped into every crack and cranny of my clothing ... we started banging and hitting my legs back to life. In 10 minutes I could drag (one) leg over the bike again, and we took off, though carefully."
Thirty miles to go to Ramah, and still in the heart of the blizzard. They made it.
Shows writes that since that excursion he has traveled to Mexico with his wife by car, by train, by plane but never again on a motorcycle.
"I love Mexico," he writes. "If you consider yourself a real-world traveler, an adventurer of sorts or daredevil in disguise, may I suggest a trip on the back of a motorcycle in the middle of winter, plowing through 60-mile-per-hour winds and blowing snow without barely stopping for 12 hours."
Hop on, if you must, but don't invite Shows.
The one story in the bunch that Shows said is fiction is "Buffalo Chip Cookies." It's a tale told to him by a student's grandmother about a single woman named Alice from the Midwest now living alone near Las Cruces.
One day, Apaches were on the way to attack her home. Furiously, she baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies. The fragrance and the flavor won over the attackers who broke through her front door then settled in to munch on the cookies.
Soon Geronimo, the famous Apache leader, showed up, mad that his men were relaxing. But he, too, was won over by Alice's cookies.
Shows writes that Geronimo had said they were shaped like a buffalo's prairie deposits, or "buffalo chips." Hence, the name buffalo chip cookies. Certainly a tall tale.
The author dedicates the book to teachers, who are his heroes.
"Teachers are the first of humanitarians," he writes. "It is the idealism they possess that leads them to endeavor to make the world a better place. No teacher enters this profession to get

rich. Lord knows we are beyond needing to compensate them better. The majority of teachers are in it to share knowledge, do good work, and direct us with their efforts to make better decisions and more positive outlooks on the future. ... Just stop for five seconds every so often and thank that special teacher who was there when no one else was and said, 'You can do this.' "

"Indians, Cowboys and UFOs" has a number of misspellings, including names of people, that slow the reading.

The 74-year-old Shows said he is preparing another memoir, this one about a high school field trip through Mexico with Navajo students.

Following that project, he's planning to write a series of mysteries set in Mexico.

When not writing, Shows works as an artist. He had been the owner of two art galleries in Albuquerque.